

TITLE

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Oración Mental, Mindfulness and Mental Prayer: The Training of the Heart in the Iberian School of Abbot García de Cisneros of Montserrat and St. Teresa of Avila

Peter Tyler

ABSTRACT

The article explores the practice of *oración mental* in the Iberian schools of the sixteenth century “Golden Age,” concentrating on the works of two authors: the *Exercitatorio de la vida spiritual* / *Exercitatorium vite spiritualis* of García Jiménez de Cisneros (1455–1510), abbot of Montserrat from 1493 to 1510 and *El Libro de la Vida* of St. Teresa of Avila (1515–1582), reformer and first prioress of the Discalced Carmelite Order. The article argues that both present a notion of contemplation that deliberately circumvents the mental or cognitive faculties advocating something closer to a notion of “prayer of the heart.” Alongside these Iberian authors the article essays the Buddhist notion of *sati*, as recently popularized in the West as the practice of mindfulness. In juxtaposing the two practices it argues that *oración mental*, especially as presented by Cisneros and Teresa, may more fruitfully be translated by the term “mindfulness” rather than the more usual and less helpful “mental prayer.”

KEYWORDS: mindfulness, mental prayer, *oración mental*, Garcia de Cisneros, Teresa of Avila, *sati*, Spanish spirituality.

INTRODUCTION

Sometimes an expression has to be taken out of the language and sent to the cleaners. Then it can be re-introduced back into circulation.

—Ludwig Wittgenstein VB: 1940¹

As the Austrian philosopher suggests, sometimes an expression can become so worn out from overuse that we have to step back and question its meaning. Such an expression, this article suggests, is “mindfulness.” As the “mindfulness revolution” continues apace, especially in the Anglophone world, numerous commentators have ques-

tioned the understanding, meaning, and derivation of the term. With reference to the original Pāli term, *sati*, Sarah Shaw has noted that “it is sometimes said that it is in those words least susceptible to translation that the life of a tradition can be found” (2008, 76). Accordingly in this article I shall briefly review some contemporary usages of *sati* before turning to the Spanish term *oración mental*, which this article will explore through the practice of the Iberian schools of the sixteenth-century Spanish “Golden Age.” It will focus in particular on the works of two authors: the *Exercitatorio de la vida spiritual* / *Exercitatorium vite spiritualis* of García Jiménez de Cisneros (1455–1510), abbot of Montserrat from 1493 to 1510 and *El Libro de la Vida* of St. Teresa of Avila (1515–1582), reformer and first prioress of the Discalced Carmelite Order. I shall argue that both present a notion of contemplation that deliberately circumvents the mental or cognitive faculties advocating something closer to a notion of “prayer of the heart,” or indeed “mindfulness.” Alongside these Iberian authors I will present the Buddhist notion of *sati*, as recently popularized in the West as the practice of mindfulness. In juxtaposing the two practices I shall argue that *oración mental*, especially as presented by Cisneros and Teresa, may be translated more fruitfully by the term “mindfulness” than the more usual and, to this author at least, less helpful “mental prayer.”

BUDDHIST MINDFULNESS—ITS ORIGINS AND PURPOSE

As the discourse of mindfulness has developed in contemporary health care, and psychological and educational settings, there has been a tendency to draw on non-Western, especially Buddhist, sources. In this respect, when reference is made to mindfulness in the Buddhist tradition, writers are usually referring to *sati*, an Indic term from the Pāli for which there is no straightforward or simple definition. The term was first translated into English as mindfulness by Thomas William Rhys Davids (1881, 107),² who noted:

Sati is literally “memory” but is used with reference to the constantly repeated phrase “mindful and thoughtful” (*sato sampagāno*); and means that activity of mind and constant presence of mind which is one of the duties most frequently inculcated on the good Buddhist. (145)³

The equivalent term in the Sanskrit canon is *smṛti*, which literally means “that which is remembered.” In the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, *sati* is paired with two other qualities. First, *sampajāna*—clearly comprehending (from the noun *sampajāñña*)—which is seen as complementing the condition of mindfulness, and second, *ātāpi* or ardency: “being intent on what you’re doing, trying your best to do it skilfully” (Thanissaro Bhikku 2010, 2). From all three together—mindfulness, clear comprehension, and ardency—we aspire to *yoniso manisikāra* or “appropriate attention.” The term “appropriate” is apposite as, the Buddha suggests, it precludes useless metaphysical wandering of the mind into questions such as, “is there a self?”

The term *ātāpi* is cognate with the Sanskrit *tapas* and suggests the conscientious

effort that must accompany mindfulness; in this respect mindfulness is not seen as a passive quality. Anālayo comments that “applying these nuances (of *ātāpi*) to *sati*, to be ‘diligent’ then amounts to keeping up one’s contemplation with balanced but dedicated continuity, returning to the object of meditation as soon as it is lost” (2003, 38). *Sampajāna*, on the other hand, is cognate with the Sanskrit *saṃ* (joined together with) and *prajānāti* (knowing), thus giving the seeker the intense knowing that will lead to wisdom, *paññā*. Bhikku Bodhi distinguishes *sati* from *sampajāñña* by suggesting that the latter allows the practitioner to clearly comprehend “the nature and qualities of arisen phenomena and relates them to the framework defined by the parameters of the Dhamma, the teaching as an organic whole” (2011, 22). As many commentators have noted, the cognate resonance of *sati* with the Sanskrit *smṛti* reminds us that the practice of *sati* helps us to recall our fundamental orientation to the precepts and path of the Buddha as we engage in observation of the self, thus implying that there is such a thing as *wrong* mindfulness—the mindfulness of, say, a terrorist preparing to detonate a bomb or attack civilians. The presence of *sampajāno* and *ātāpi* accompanying *sati* should preclude this.

This usage raises a question mark over the appropriation of mindfulness as a practice of “bare attention” by many contemporary users of the term.⁴ In a perceptive essay, Robert Scharf notes that this notion of bare attention, as widely adopted today, has its origins in the teachings of the Burmese Master, Mahāsi Sayādaw (1904–1982) who stressed the development of *sati* at the expense of *samatha* and *jhāna* (2014). His student, Siegmund Feniger (1901–1994), who took the name Nyanaponika Thera, popularized this notion of bare attention in the West, especially through his 1954 book, *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation* (Scharf 2014, 480 n. 6).⁵ Although many contemporary Western practitioners of mindfulness prefer the description bare attention, following the arguments of Scharf and seeing it in context within the *Suttas* as concomitant with *sampajāna* and *ātāpi*, a strong case can be made that it is closer to the original Sanskrit “remembrance” when evoked during contemplation. Following this line of argument *sati* thus suggests a neutral observation of what is happening in the mind without cognitive intervention. Anālayo tells us that it requires “uninvolved and detached receptivity”—silently observing “without doing anything” (2003, 58), while Bhikkhu Bodhi describes it as “lucid awareness of the phenomenal field” (2011, 22). It is, says Bodhi, “a stance of *watchfulness* or *observation* towards one’s own experience” (2011, 25). With this before us, and remembering that *sati* in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* accompanies bodily sensations, feelings (*vedanā*), mind (*citta*), and mental/emotional qualities (*dhammas*), it could be argued, as some Buddhists have suggested to me, that “heartfulness” would also be an equally acceptable English translation of the Pāli *sati* rather than the more cognitive “mindfulness.”⁶ This would certainly accord with the argument presented in this article. In many ways heartfulness is a better word for what we find in the Christian tradition rather than the more cognitive mindfulness. That being so, with mindfulness being the current buzzword (like that other slippery term “spirituality”), I shall continue to work with the elusive term “mindfulness” for the purposes of this article but ask the reader to keep this caveat “in mind.”

MINDFULNESS AND CHRISTIANITY

In his monumental study of "*la mística Española*" between 1500 and 1700, Melquíades Andrés Martín stresses the continuity within the Spanish mystical tradition and its origins in the reform movements at the end of the fifteenth century (1975). These movements were often contradictory and unclear and Andrés Martín notes:

This reform movement oscillated between the study of theology, revived by the Dominicans, and a certain anti-intellectualism, which would initially invoke a certain anti-verbosity, within the Franciscans and Augustinians, and much later affective prayer (*oración afectiva*) which placed more value on experience and love over study and intellect. (1975, 2)⁷

With reference to a favored expression for prayer used by these authors Andrés Martín refers to these authors as *los recogidos*—literally "the recollected ones." The use of the term *recogimiento* is instructive, as the term "recollection" reminds us of the memory or recalling functions of *sati* discussed above. For the Spanish authors, however, the term has resonances of "affective prayer" and a "return to the heart." We can accordingly give a working definition of *recogimiento* as "an experiential tasting of God through contemplation." Of particular importance to this nascent movement at the beginning of the sixteenth century were the reforms initiated within the Franciscan movement. These reforms found expression in a series of remarkable spiritual manuals beginning with the Seville edition of the *Obras de Bonaventura* of 1497, followed by the *Incendium Amoris* and *Liber meditationum* from the presses of the Abbey of Montserrat in Catalonia. Subsequently we find editions of St. Augustine, St. Bernard, and St. Richard of St. Victor rapidly being produced. In the *Exercitatorio de la vida espiritual* of García de Cisneros of 1500, another of this first wave of spiritual classics, we find the first written definition of the "prayer of recollection": "Recollect yourself often from low things to high, from temporal to eternal, from exterior to interior, from vain things to those that endure."⁸ As this form of affective or recollected prayer emerges in early modern Spain we see the influence of a whole range of authors, in particular from the Dionysian and Victorine schools and the Franciscan reformers of the late fifteenth century. One such description of this type of prayer is to be found in the *Tercer Abecedario* (Third spiritual alphabet) of the Franciscan friar Francisco de Osuna (1527), which would subsequently have such a powerful effect on the spiritual development of the young Teresa of Avila.

Consequently, the remainder of this article will concentrate on the form of contemplative practice described in both Cisneros and Teresa, which, it will be argued, is closest to the Buddhist notions of *sati* already surveyed and possesses a consonance with the emerging notion of mindfulness as understood in the present secular Western setting. The Spanish authors reference this spiritual practice by using the term *oración mental*, normally translated into English as "mental prayer." In describing these practices I want to suggest that mindfulness, as recently rediscovered in the Anglophone world, would not be entirely inappropriate as a translation for this term. However, as stated above, I think the Christian prayer tradition is best understood as

a dialogue of head and heart—it is not simply cognitive as some of the contemporary strands of mindfulness suggest. In this respect I am not making a case for *sati*/mindfulness as “bare attention”: The Christian way of mindfulness is a Prayer of the Heart, a form of heartfulness.

Second, in contrast to some of the Buddhist and psychological models of mindfulness, the Christian path is one that clearly acknowledges the transcendental/transpersonal within the human personality (see Tyler 2016). Christian prayer/mindfulness can be distinguished from Buddhist prayer in that for the Christian there is always a transcendental perspective on the soul. This may be the case in some of the types of Buddhist meditation discussed above but it is not necessarily so. With these two caveats in mind let us turn to our Iberian interlocutors.

THE TRAINING OF THE HEART IN THE SCHOOL OF ABBOT CISNEROS

García Jiménez de Cisneros (1455–1510) was the cousin of the Spanish Patriarch, Cardinal Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros and abbot of Montserrat (by command of the Catholic Monarchs) from 1493 to 1510. His *Exercitatorio de la vida espiritual* was first published by the presses of Montserrat in 1500 along with his *Directorio de las Horas Canónicas* and is seen now as one of the harbingers of that great spring flowering of Spanish mystical writing in the Golden Age of the sixteenth century. In as far as it is referred to today it is in the context of the young Iñigo de Loyola who stayed in the environs of the abbey for some months before he made his way to the Holy Land after his conversion.⁹

Like many of his contemporaries Cisneros was wonderfully eclectic in his range of sources for this book of *Exercises*. As well as material from St. Bonaventure (*De Triplici Via, Soliloquium de quatuor mentalibus exercitiis*) and other Franciscan sources such as Francisc Eiximenis's *Tractat de contemplació* and Carthusian sources such as Hugh of Balma's *Viae Lugent Sion*, he draws liberally on the work of the former chancellor of the University of Paris, Jean Gerson, to whom he refers by name over fifty times (primarily drawing on the *Mountain of Contemplation*; see Tyler 2017). Of the sixty-nine chapters of the *Exercitatorio*, O'Reilly (1973), following Barault (1967), identifies fifteen taken from Zutphen (seven from *De reformation virium animae* and eight from *De spiritualibus ascensionibus*), one from Thomas a Kempis's *Hortus rosarum*, and eleven from Mombaer's *Rosetum* (whom Cisneros met in Paris in 1496). This is supplemented by material from the recent books of *devotio moderna*, then popular on the Iberian peninsula, including passages from Ludolph of Saxony's *Vita Christi* (which was to so influence Loyola) and the work of Nicholas Kempf (*Alphabetum divini amoris*, usually attributed at this time to Gerson).¹⁰

In chapters 8 and 9 of the *Exercitatorio* we find Cisneros's first instructions on *oración mental* as a means toward the “training of the heart”: *de exercitar su corazón/exerceat cor suam*. The nascent Spanish movement of affective prayer at the beginning of the sixteenth century was an entirely democratic one. Cisneros may have been a monk writing in the lofty fastnesses of Montserrat but he is very insistent that the prayer techniques being taught were for all folk—not just religious and monastics.

As he stresses in chapter 32: “Thus we have seen that just because a person is simple it doesn’t mean that the contemplative life is forbidden to them; for, we have seen, and still do see by experience, devout hermits, and some women draw more profit from this contemplative life and grow to love God more deeply than many important clergy and learned religious folk (*grandes clérigos y religiosos letrados*)” (*Exercitatorio* 32:33–38, p. 278).¹¹ The seeker, he suggests, often commences on the road to contemplation in a state of confusion with a disturbed mind. He gives an accurate portrayal of this in chapter 39:

At times it comes to pass that a man is alone in the body and withdrawn from the company of others, yet none the less he suffers phantasies, cogitations and melancholia (*fantasias, cogitaciones y malenconías*), and finds within himself most heavy and burdensome company. And such phantasies engender in him delirium and turmoil and cause him to speak much and be garrulous within his understanding. For the eyes of his understanding see first one thing and afterwards another: now they are led to the kitchen, now to the market: before them are brought carnal and unclean delights, dances, songs, beauties and such like vanities. (*Exercitatorio* 39:10–18, p. 298)

The *oración mental* will thus be the means whereby the heart “like an unstable ship, tossed hither and thither on the waves, occupying itself in diverse affections and meditations (*affectos y meditaciones*)” (*Exercitatorio* 68:74–76, p. 436) will be brought to harbor. This recollection, conducted in a secret and quiet place, will thus calm the heart and make the seeker ready to enter the greater mysteries of the proposed contemplative path.¹² Its fruits, he suggests, comprise a more stable self (*Exercitatorio* 3:21, p. 102), a dissociation from distracting thoughts (3:31, p. 102), fervor (here we are close to the “ardency” of *ātāpi*, 3:45, p. 102), self-knowledge (*conoscimiento*—again reminiscent of the *sampajañña* discussed earlier) and, finally, progress and merit on the spiritual path.

In contrast to the earlier Buddhist descriptions of *sati*, however, Cisneros also stresses in chapter 8 that the aim of his program is to “soar to heaven with enkindled desire” (*por desseos ençendidos al çielo / cum anima ignitis desiderio in celum conatur ascendere*). This notion of the ascent of the heart to God is one Cisneros takes from the medieval Dionysian tradition, often referring to Hugh of Balma’s *Viae Sion Lugent* (VSL), available in Iberia at this juncture under the translated title of *Sol de Contemplativos*. Hugh of Balma’s *Viae Sion Lugent* adopts the twelfth-century innovations of the Victorines and Cistercians, especially in the incorporation of the affective into the Dionysian tradition, as well as building on it to develop a very experiential understanding of the role of the *affectus* in the search for God. Although the text does not use Dionysius’s *eros* by name it makes use of the affective erotic schemas of Gallus to make its point. Influenced by Gerson this tradition will also influence Teresa by way of her reading of Francisco de Osuna (see Tyler 2017).

In his work Balma contrasts “human curiosity” or “useless science” (*relicta humana curiositate scientiae inutilis argumentorum et opinionum captiva*, VSL, 3), which is the

knowledge of “philosophers, scholars and secular masters” (VSL, 4), searching after new curiosities, proofs, and ideas contained within the covers of “sheepskin quartos” (VSL, 2), with the *vera sapientia*, the “true knowledge” that will be expounded in his pages. Crucially, this first type of knowledge does not allow the “flaming affections of love” (*per flammigeras amoris adfectiones*) to reach the Creator. The second type of knowledge, the *vera sapientia*, or as he refers to it later, the *mystica theologia* (VSL, 2), is the knowledge that arises from this flaming affection of love that inflames the affect (*affectus*) and enlightens the intellect (*intellectus*) (VSL, 3). These “fiery aspirations of love” raise the soul to God and true knowledge: “very rapidly, quicker than can be thought, without any prior or concomitant thought (*cogitation*), whenever she pleases, hundreds or thousands of times both day and night, the soul is drawn to possess God alone through countless yearning desires” (VSL 5).

CISNEROS ON DIONYSIUS AND BALMA

Cisneros develops these Balmerian/Dionysian notions of the fiery ascent of the soul to God in chapter 28 of the *Exercitatorio* onward, “How the soul is lifted to God through quick and fervent love.”¹³ Following Balma we have here an essentially Dionysian spiritual anthropology. Up to now, he says, he has described how the intellect (*entendimiento*) has been transformed by meditation and prayer—in particular “the firing of divine desire within the soul” (*desideria ignite ignis divini amoris est accendendus*) (*Exercitatorio* 28:6–7, p. 257). Yet from this point onward the soul is raised to God not through “any labor of the understanding” (*sin ninguna obra del entendimiento*, 28:10, p. 258), for “as St. Dionysius says, the wisdom is known by means of our ignorance, for no reasoning or understanding or human knowledge can raise the exercitant to a union after this manner” (*ninguna razón ni entendimiento ni conocimiento humano / nulla humana ratio, intellectus vel noticia elevat animam*, 28:12–14, p. 258). Thus, the intellect and “mental capacities” are insufficient to allow the soul to reach God—we need another capacity, which is why in this article I prefer the term “mindfulness” (or even heartfulness), rather than mental prayer as a translation of Cisneros’ *oración mental*. Quoting Dionysius again he states that this wisdom “which attains to God” is not possible by “wearying itself in speculations concerning Him or in thinking of Him in any lofty speculative manner whatsoever, unless this awakens love” (*quod non speculatur vel considerat eum speculative vel subtiliter, quod quidem non movet ad amorem* 28:40–42, p. 259). For, “no tongue can describe it as the whole work is a purely spiritual one” (*por ninguna lengua, ca todo esto es pura obra spiritual*, 28:53–54, p. 258). To conclude his chapter the abbot stresses how such contemplation, by circumventing the intellect, makes it ideally suited to any manner of person “however simple, whether an agricultural worker or a simple old woman” (*labrador o una simple vegezuela*, 28:56–57, p. 258) who by this procedure “may be quickly changed into a wise disciple,” thus confirming the connection in Cisneros’s thought between the availability of recollected *oración mental* and the wider accessibility of the fruits of this prayer to all seekers, not just those in monasteries and cloisters. In this respect the prayer anticipates the wider

democratic changes of the Reformation that will overtake the Western church later in the sixteenth century and even the resurgence in general interest in mindfulness practices in our own time.

In summary, following writers such as Balma we thus see in Cisneros a clear statement of *oración mental* not as a process of refining the intellect (*entendimiento* or *pensamiento*) but rather of going “under the radar” of thought by means of contemplative exercises. The seeker engages in a process akin to *sati* whereby they observe the rising and falling of thoughts as a means leading to the quieting of the heart. We shall observe a similar process in the work of Teresa of Avila.

TERESA OF AVILA

I take my second example of Christian mindfulness from the writings of the sixteenth-century Spanish saint, Teresa of Avila. Writing half a century later than Cisneros, Teresa, as we have seen, shared many of the influences that had shaped Cisneros's spirituality although it is unlikely that she would have read Cisneros's work itself. However, like Cisneros, she prefers an affective prayer that we could classify under our earlier general heading of *recogimiento*. Just as Cisneros had been influenced by the Victorine Dionysianism of Balma, so Teresa found her inspiration in the *Third Spiritual Alphabet* of the Franciscan, Francisco de Osuna, given to her by a wise uncle when she stumbled along the spiritual path as a young nun (see Tyler 2013).

Central to Osuna's affective theology in *The Third Spiritual Alphabet* (TA) is the notion of a “taste” for God rather than knowledge. In many passages he plays on the word *saber* (know) and *sabor* (taste) much as we will later see Teresa does. In Osuna's words, the “mystical theology”¹⁴ is a *sabroso saber*—literally, a “tasty knowledge”:

They also call this type of prayer “wisdom” because, as you can see, it is a tasty knowledge (*sabroso saber*); such knowledge, according to Saint Paul, is only found amongst the perfect, for the imperfect are not given such tasty morsels or such high doctrine (*tan buen manjar*). And it is called “wisdom” for through it people will know how to taste God (*saben los hombres a qué sabe Dios*); of which taste the Wise Man says when he speaks of God: He gave wisdom to those who worked mercifully. (TA, 6.2)¹⁵

Osuna, following the medieval tradition, named this type of theology “mystical theology,” as opposed to what the scholastics called “speculative theology”—akin to what is taught in most Western universities today under the term “theology.” For Osuna, and later Teresa, mystical theology is thus a way of “tasty knowing”:

[Theology] has two forms: one is called “speculative” or “investigative,” which is the same thing, the other is called “hidden,” which is treated of here and which gives the title to this Third Alphabet. I do not presume to teach it here, as no mortal can, for Christ alone reserves this teaching only for himself, in secret and in the hearts in which this hidden theology dwells as divine science and something much more excellent than the other theology of which I spoke

first. . . . This theology [mystical theology] is said to be more perfect and better than the first, so says Gerson, as the first serves as an introduction leading to the second. (TA, 6.2)¹⁶

Such direct experiential mystical theology is clearly what appealed to Teresa and she was to make this her own in works such as the famous *Book of the Life* (*El Libro de la Vida*).

ORACIÓN MENTAL IN TERESA'S WRITINGS

Teresa's first account of *oración mental* in her writings comes in an extended account in *The Life*, chapters 8 to 10. Here she contrasts the peace she receives from this activity with the "war so troublesome" where she would frequently "fall and rise" (V, 8.2; *con estas caídas y con levantarme*), as her passions came and left her. In her last work, *The Interior Castle*, she brilliantly describes such thoughts:

We shall always be glancing around and saying: "Are people looking at me or not?" "If I take a certain path shall I come to any harm?" "Dare I begin such and such a task?" "Is it pride that is impelling me to do this?" "Can anyone as wretched as I engage in so lofty an exercise as prayer?" "Will people think better of me if I refrain from following the crowd?" "For extremes are not good" they say, "even in virtue; and I am such a sinner that if I were to fail I should only have farther to fall; perhaps I shall make no progress and in that case I shall only be doing good people harm; anyway, a person like myself has no need to make herself singular!" (M, 1.2.10)¹⁷

This is as good a description as any of what Buddhists call the "monkey mind,"¹⁸ which contemporary practices of mindfulness seek to bring into stability by means such as awareness exercises. From the very beginning of her writing career Teresa is aware of this internal conflict between stabilized awareness of "the heart" and the need to work with distracting *pensamiento*.

Her practice of contemplation, she says, "drew her to the harbor of salvation" (*a puerto de salvación*, V: 8.4). She refers to it here and later as her *trato con Dios*: *Que no es otra cosa oración mental, a mi parecer, sino tratar de amistad, estando muchas veces tratando a solas con quien sabemos nos ama* ("For mental prayer/mindfulness is none other, it appears to me, than a close intercourse, frequently practiced on an intimate basis, with the one we know loves us").¹⁹ The pivotal word here being *trato*—a difficult one to translate.

Where Teresa's method of prayer differs so clearly from the Buddhist mindfulness detailed above is the role that visualization and symbolic representation of Christ plays in her meditations.²⁰ However where Teresa's account of mindfulness converges with the Buddhist accounts above is the importance of drawing attention away from intellectual and mental activity to the location of what she calls "the heart." This, following the argument of this article, is not an anti-intellectual move but rather a consequence of the strategy of the medieval mystical theology to which she is heir. To overcome the whirring discourse of the intellect we will need to concentrate on

the mindful *trato* with the beloved. This is why I feel the term “mental prayer” can be misleading and why I prefer mindfulness, or even as I said earlier heartfulness, as a translation of *oración mental*. “Mental” seems to have the contemporary association with the mind and cognitive activity, whereas, I would like to suggest, Teresa is advocating something closer to the Buddhist practice of mindfulness outlined above, and certainly closer to the contemporary practice of mindfulness discussed by commentators such as Jon Kabat-Zinn. As she says later in chapter 13: “therefore it is of great importance, when we begin to practice prayer, not to be intimidated by thoughts, and believe you me, for I have had experience of this” (*Ansí que va mucho a los principios de comenzar oración a no amilinar los pensamientos, y créanme esto, porque lo tengo por espierencia*, V, 13.7). Or as she later puts it in chapter 17, rather poetically translated by Matthew, the thoughts are like “unquiet little Gnatts, which buzze, and whizze by night, heer and there, for just so, are these Powers wont to goe, from one to another” (V, 17.6).²¹

In summary then, from these passages I think a strong case can be made to regard Teresa’s *oración mental* as closer to the contemporary notion of mindfulness, or heartfulness (both terms convey, I would argue, the studied imprecision that Teresa is aiming at), than may at first sight be apparent. In the descriptions above what clearly differentiates Teresa’s approach is the necessary connection between her own mindful prayer and attention in meditation to the person of Christ. Yet where she comes close to the Buddhist masters is her challenge to the discursive power of the intellect and the necessary use of symbol and image to allow this power to be “short-circuited” to allow direct awareness of self and indeed all creation around (in V, 9.5). In consequence I don’t think it is far-fetched to talk of Teresa, in the early stages at least, as advocating a practice of “mindfulness or heartfulness” as she refashions and makes her own the tradition of *recogimiento* to which she is heir.

CONCLUSIONS

I have argued that the Spanish term *oración mental*, as used by Cisneros and Teresa, would be better understood from the present context as a cousin to the Buddhist mindfulness. I would go so far as to prefer the term “mindfulness” or “heartfulness” as a translation of the term into English. My reasons can be summarized as follows:

1. As used in the contemplative schemas of both Cisneros and Teresa it is not fanciful to see it described as a process of “mindful attention”—particularly to what they term “the heart” as a means of circumventing the action of the mind (the monkey mind). Rather they are suggesting a means (following Dionysius) of “learned ignorance” whereby we shut down the cognitive faculties all the better to guide “the soul” to experiential awareness of the Divine.
2. The current obsession with the “mental” creates a too-cognitive resonance that is not the intention of the authors, rather they want to move away from the head to the heart.
- 3 For the reasons given it is possible to scope out an understanding of *sati* that is as much heartfulness as mindfulness: Indeed its link to the Sanskrit *smṛti*

suggests a “family resemblance” to the recollection/*recogimiento* of the Spanish school.

4. Like the Buddha, Cisneros in particular, stresses that we must not engage in useless speculation on the nature of the Godhead but rather engage simply in contemplation for contemplation’s sake.
6. The abbot’s notion of mental prayer is very democratic. As he concludes the *Exercitatorio*: “many who live in the world and have sufficient time, leisure, knowledge and talent to devote themselves wholly to God . . . [should have] . . . faith, hope and charity for there is no great instruction for them to seek, by engaging in profound study, that they may devote all their affection to God” (*Exercitatorio* 67:49–55, 433). This attitude has resonances with the contemporary “lay” rediscovery of mindfulness as contemplative practice. As Teresa puts it in the *Camino*, the path of *oración mental* is as much for “the unskilled peasant boy” as “the wisest and most learned of men.” (CV, 22)

In a recent essay comparing the path of the *Cloud of Unknowing* with the Buddhist Dhamma, Rupert Gethin concludes that both traditions “present the contemplative path, the path of purification, as a turning away from ordinary discursive thought by means of techniques of simplifying and emptying the mind.”²² By such means, Gethin suggests, the “heart” of the seeker is profoundly restructured by engaging in contemplative practices. If, as I have argued, Teresa and Cisneros are likewise inviting us to engage in this move away from the abstractions of the intellect to the heart of spiritual transformation then it seems that their term for this process—*oración mental*—will be better conveyed to a contemporary Anglophone audience by “heartfulness” or “mindfulness” than the cognitive “mental prayer.”

NOTES

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1. “*Man muß manchmal einen Ausdruck aus der Sprache herausziehen, ihn zum Reinigen geben.—und kann ihn dann wieder in den Verkehr einführen.*” My translation.

2. “Right Mindfulness: The active, watchful mind.”

3. As Rupert Gethin (2011) points out, Rhys Davids’s translation was enormously influential on subsequent Buddhist studies and was adopted by most scholars thereafter.

4. See, for example, Mace (2008), and Thera (1994:73): “By bare attention we understand the clear and single-minded awareness of what actually happens to us and in us, at the successive moments of perception. It is called ‘bare’ because it attends to the bare facts of perception without reacting to them by deed, speech or mental comment.”

5. Through his influence, amongst others, on teachers such as Jack Kornfield (b. 1945) and Joseph Goldstein (b. 1944).

6. See, for example, the 2014 presentation at the American Academy of Religion in San Diego by Michael Spezio, Brent Field, and Kevin Reimer: *Heartfulness as Mindfulness: Imitatio of Affectivity and Perspective in Christian Contemplative Practice*. The notion has been confirmed by conversations with Buddhist monks in India and Europe and is described in Ajahn Brahm’s *Kindfulness* (2016).

7. My translation. *Este movimiento de reforma oscila entre el estudio de la teología, avivado por los dominicos, y un cierto anti-intelectualismo, que llamaría mejor inicialmente anti-verbosismo, entre los franciscos y agustinos, y más tarde oración afectiva por valorar más la experiencia y el amor que el estudio y el entendimiento.*

8. *Recolígete muchas veces de las cosas baxas a las altas. De las temporales a las eternas. De las exteriores a las interiores. De las vanas a las que siempre han durar* (452, 69:133–135).

9. I shall use the edition in the *Obras Completas* edited by Dom Cipriano Baraut (Montserrat, 1965). Although I shall mainly make my own translations of the work, Catalan and Latin versions, I have consulted Allison Peers's 1929 translation of the Catalan text and that of the "Monk of St Augustine's Monastery" (1876) of the Latin text. I shall give page number, paragraph and chapter from Baraut's edition for each citation.

10. For more on the wider influences on Cisneros see O'Reilly 1973, Baraut 1967, and Melloni 2000.

11. I have argued elsewhere that here, as in so much, Cisneros is heavily influenced by the work of Jean Gerson (see Tyler 2017).

12. Again, Cisneros is remarkably flexible in the methods he prescribes. The seeker may adopt the bodily posture for prayer that they find most agreeable (he suggests many).

13. The Catalan version is, *Cómo nuestro pensamiento se levanta en dios por bivo y ardiente amor (sin algún conosciento del entendimiento, ni de otra cosa alguna)*, causing Allison Peers to translate "how our thought is lifted up to God." I prefer "soul" to "thought" as a translation for the reasons set out in Tyler 2016, especially the final chapter.

14. In this respect Osuna is following the medieval Victorines and Gerson in their distinction between the *vera sapientia* (i.e., the mystical theology) and the "useless scientific curiosity" of the intellectual mind, as described above. See also Tyler 2011.

15. *Llámese también esta manera de oración sabiduría, que, según viste, es sabroso saber; la cual sabiduría dice San Pablo que hablaba entre los perfectos solamente, porque a los imperfectos no les daba tan buen manjar ni tan alta doctrina. Y dicesse sabiduría porque mediante ella saben los hombres a qué sabe Dios; donde de aquésta dice el Sabio hablando de Dios: A los que piadosamente obran dio la sabiduría.* Mary Giles writes in her translation of this passage (1981:164): "Osuna's play on the word 'saber' which means both 'to know' and 'to taste' defies translation."

16. *La cual aún es en dos maneras: una se llama especulativa o escudriñadora, que es el mismo, y otra escondida, que es la que se trata o a la que se intitula este tercero alfabeto; no que en él presuma yo enseñarla, pues ninguno de los mortales la enseñó, porque Christo guardó para sí este oficio de enseñar en secreto a los corazones en que viviese aquesta teología escondida como ciencia divina y mucho más excelente que la otra teología de que hablamos primer . . . Esta teología se dice más perfecta o mejor que la primera, según dice Gersón, porque de la primera como de un principio se servir.*

17. I have used Allison Peers's translation here as he brings out perfectly Teresa's sense of an "inner dialogue," which proceeds in the mind of one starting out on a path of prayer or contemplation.

18. Or as Teresa calls it poetically in V:15.6, "the grinding mill of the intellect"—*moledor entendimiento*. In the same passage she also refers to "restless bees" that "gad about" (Matthew's translation).

19. Again, a tricky passage to translate and preserve the sense of intimacy Teresa wants to convey here. Allison Peers retains this sense with his translation: "Mental prayer, in my view, is nothing but friendly intercourse, and frequent solitary converse, with Him Who we know loves us." Kavanaugh and Rodriguez give a more distant, "Mental prayer in my opinion is nothing less than an intimate sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us." Perhaps the intimacy we would experience with a boyfriend or girlfriend is suggested.

20. See, for example, V: 9.1–4, and the beginning of her lengthy discourse in the *Camino on oración mental* where she points out how we must behave in such an encounter (CV:22).

21. *Que no parece sino de estas maripositas de las noches, importunas y desasosegadas: así anda de un cabo a otro.*

22. From "Emptiness and Unknowing: An essay in Comparative Mysticism," *Studies in Early Buddhism in Memory of L. S. Cousins* ed. Peter Harvey and Naomi Appleton (London: Equinox, forthcoming).

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CV *Camino de Perfección/ The Way of Perfection*, Valladolid Redaction

M *Moradas del Castillo Interior / The Interior Castle*

V *El Libro de La Vida / The Book of the Life*

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